

**Thriving through Soul-making: An Analysis of a Switchfoot Song
through the lens of Hillman's *Revisioning Psychology***

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One way to understand what depth psychologist James Hillman means by soul-making in his book, *Re-visioning Psychology* is by examining a work of art for the psychological moves of personification, pathologizing, psychologizing and dehumanizing that Hillman set forth in the soul-making process. In fact, the very term soul-making comes from the world of art as it was a romantic poet, Keats who stated in a letter to his brother, "call the world if you please, the vale of soul-making". Though Hillman extends this concept further later on to refer to a perspective of reflection mediating a person and events (Hillman, 1975 pp. xvi), the roots in art offer possibilities of further examples of soul-making along with elucidation of the process. An area similar to poetry where soul-making is arguably present is in music. In this paper I will be examining the lyrics in the song, "Thrive" by Switchfoot, a confessional piece about wanting to find one's way back to living with a sense of purpose after being alienated from one's sense of self. Through unpacking the lyrics in terms of personification, pathologizing, psychologizing and dehumanizing with an eye for the image in the piece I hope to demonstrate how these psychic moves introduced by Hillman can contribute to an understanding of psyche's capacity of making soul through art.

The song begins with a confession and disclosure of multiplicity as the heroic perspective, the fighter, is confronted with invisible enemies, bringing us into relation with the nonliteral with the lyric: "Been fighting things that I can't see in/Like voices coming from the inside of me and." The battle expressed here is with multiple opponents that originate from within the hero himself, bringing forth the humbling idea that a multiplicity of perspectives could be contained within that he cannot "see in". In giving recognition to both the things he cannot see and the many voices in the polytheistic psyche the protagonist is engaging in personifying, which Hillman defines as "the spontaneous experiencing and envisioning and speaking of the configurations of existence as psychic presences"(Hillman, 1975 pp. 12). By speaking of the voices spontaneously arising from inside him as things or presences that he is fighting, the narrator is personifying the non-ego forces that emerge from within him as opponents with whom he is actively engaging in imaginative battle. This relativizes the ego as it is an admission that what he is fighting has emerged from inside of him and that there are other forces at work in the protagonists being besides the ego.

Further, these forces are not overtly sensed, challenging the literal perspective as "seeing and hearing are deliteralized, having lost their sense sense" (Hillman, 2000, pp. 173). The heroic ego must contend with not being able to rely on his senses with opponents as some are unseen into, and perhaps only metaphorically heard as the voices are coming from inside himself in nonliteral configurations. Through this acknowledgement, the

soul is moving through the protagonist, making room through the non-literal opponent which could be himself, as “personifying is the soul’s answer to egocentricity” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 32). This enables the ego to recognize forces outside itself through personification of his inner opponents and through the undermining of the traditional sense of senses in overcoming egocentricity.

The lyrics continue: “Like doing things I find hard to believe in/Am I myself or am I dreaming?” Here the protagonist is admitting he is not always in charge of his own actions, performing them without believing in them. The protagonist relates this lack of control to dreaming, where the person that may or may not be him is engaging in actions he may not be willing to do. The question here could be a form of psychologizing, or seeing through the idea of self or dreaming. Hillman notes of dreaming, in *Image-Sense*, “the spontaneous confusion of the senses when speaking of dreams is so very important :it shakes our foundations” (Hillman 2000, pp. 174). Taken together with the confusion of the seeing and hearing in the previous lyrics, the disorientation of speaking about the deliteralized sense phenomena conjures a psychologized dichotomy between self and dream self, seeing through the illusion of egoic awareness, challenging the foundations of control of actions and into a more relative world of movement in soul. In other words, the heroic ego confronts the lack of control in a plurality of sensory personifications in a psychologized dream self that is contradictory to the traditional awake sensing self. It is this

admission of confusion, tension between waking action and dream state that further opens the possibility for soul-making as the protagonist's ego is challenged by another force moving through him which he refers to as a dreaming self.

The piece continues: "I've been awake for an hour or so/Checking for a pulse but I just don't know". Here waking from sleep reflects a struggle to bring to light an internal battle. This brings us to Hillman's concept of pathologizing, or "psyche's autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering in any aspect of its behavior and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective" (Hillman, 1975, pp.57) The illness described is the suffering of the conscious self not being able to sleep, falling apart from the normalcy of sleeping through the night. He then sees with the perspective of affliction by checking for a pulse, a sign of life and health prompted by being awake. The lack of certainty in finding a pulse in the lyric calls into question even the evidence of life vs death which is unresolved as it is psyche herself causing him to see through the pathological perspective. Even with the evidence that he is alive physically with a pulse, there would still be the sense of uncertainty of really living as the protagonist is imagining through the perspective of pathology.

Further, objective confirmation of life does not seem to be the salve to his dis-ease. Checking for external "norms" will not alleviate his nebulously pathological personal struggle. Feeling into the "pathologizing thus afflicts

the very fantasy of norms themselves, the idea that there are objective standards, bench marks for the soul, its fantasy, its madness, its fate” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 87). Again, even if the protagonist could find an objective pulse, his lens from pathologizing has already gripped him in the fantasy of sickness beyond external norms. Moving away from measurement of health and objective data in pathologizing suggests that another phenomena, psyche, may be at work controlling his fate, which in turn gives room for soul to sing.

The following lyric continues, “Am I a man when I feel like a ghost?/The stranger in the mirror is wearing my clothes”. Through posing the question of whether one could still be a man if one feels like a ghost this lyric shows that the psyche is again challenging the ego’s sense of self. Here the feeling of alienation, not really being who one is can be seen through Hillman’s idea of depersonalization. Hillman writes in *Revisioning Psychology*, “clinically, loss of soul is spoken of as ‘depersonalization’ a condition in which the ‘personal coefficient’ standing behind the ego and its relation with self and world is suddenly absent” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 44). Feeling like a ghost speaks to the sense of emptiness resulting from depersonalization as it is contrasted with being a man, the ego feeling absent in the interface with the world.

Further the protagonist refers to the person in the mirror wearing his clothes as a stranger, an image that suggests detachment from the “personal coefficient” of personal clothing, or feeling estranged from one’s

own self-expression. Further, the symbol of estrangement can only become an image in the Hillmanian sense as “as symbols become images when they are particularized in a specific context, mood and scene (Hillman, 1977 pp. 62). Hence the protagonist’s clothes both particularize the image as we imagine what his clothes would be in the context of the song and also contribute to the archetype of detachment he is experiencing. Further, the God in the image, the stranger in the mirror wearing his clothes, that psyche is employing could be Dionysus, “god of carnivals and masquerades and patron saint of actors, is also the masked god or god of masks” (Paris, 1990 pp. 59). By making his own clothes the “mask” of a stranger, Dionysus is alienating the protagonist from himself, perhaps demanding ego dismemberment to make way for the soul, as “one has to let go of the heroic posture to understand Dionysos” (Paris, 1990, pp. 58). This image of stranger in the mirror wearing his clothes demonstrates the grip archetypes such as Dionysos can have on us, sometimes giving the feeling of losing oneself in the move of depersonalization to open us up to the larger whole of the psyche beyond the heroic ego.

The Chorus then begins-“No, I'm not alright/I know that I'm not right”. Here an honest response to the common question of whether one is alright becomes an overcoming of the ego in the confessional lyrics. Knowing that one is not right is the beginning of an acceptance of uncertainty as pathology leads to humility, the ego realizing it is out of alignment without soul. Hence, it is through pathologizing not being in soul

that he is able to make soul in his passionate musical appeal. Further, the lyrics do not say blatantly that something is wrong, as one can be both not right and not wrong. Not being alright or right is not the same as being sick or well, as with pathologizing “categories of positive and negative, health and disease, do not apply” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 84). The pathology is in the endless ways of being away from soul, instead of being wrong. Thus the pathology of not being in soul is what leads him to overcoming the ego in a surrendered appeal to the soul in the song.

In addition to the pathologizing of being away from soul in not being right, the lyrics could also be interpreted with “right” standing for societal norms that the soul is pathologizing through to reveal the sickness of modern-day society. The answer of no to the theoretical question of “are you alright?” becomes a departure from the health obsessed, egoic conformity, land of spirit rather than soul. The pathologizing leading to his admission of no works on behalf of soul to distance him from the cultural perspective of the west, where “when we are told what is healthy we are being told what is right to think and feel. When we are told what is mentally ill we are being told what ideas, behavior, and fantasies are wrong” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 77) The pathologizing becomes a way to break free from this control of the status quo, finding soul through having the courage to be free of the reductive labels of right and wrong that have been culturally indoctrinated in the west.

The Chorus continues, "A steering wheel doesn't mean you can drive/ A warm body don't mean I'm alive". Here the image of the steering wheel is personified to reveal the limitation in the western materialistic viewpoint. According to Hillman, in the move of personification, "the noun takes on consciousness, it becomes personified" (Hillman, 1975, pp. 1). In this case, the steering wheel is the noun which takes on the consciousness of willpower, or an ability to direct one's course through the world. Speaking as if from experience of not being able to drive, the narrator personifies the steering wheel as directive ability which does not necessarily confer motive ability. The personification then connects to pathology through the idea that just because one has the capacity to steer does not mean one can drive, or have the discernment or contextual adequacy necessary to navigate. The archetype of captain or leader of one's life can be disastrous if embodied in the wrong circumstance. Further, in literal terms, one cannot drive with only a steering wheel. One needs the whole car and a place to go. In personified terms, one cannot move through life with only the ability to control direction, one needs the purpose of the soul. The personification of steering wheel thus leads to awareness of the ailment of moving without soul.

The warm body is then personified as the western reductive consciousness of active functionality to show the delusion of outward appearance leading to ability. Even with the whole warm body, or the whole running car, there is something missing, as "the soul is lost in its literal

perspective, its identity with material life (Hillman, 1975, pp.90). In parallel with the car, the warm body's personification as literal functionality in the material realm shows the limitations in the measuring egoic perspective which would say nothing is wrong if the body demonstrated standardized signs of health. The dysfunction in the lyrics amidst the personified functionality speaks to something missing, in a way a personification that reflects a surrender to the soul's capacity to pathologise. Both the car and the body are personified as functional in the material, but without soul they cannot carry out what they are meant to. In personifying the literal standpoint, the lyrics thus reveal its lack of soul.

Concluding the chorus is the lyric that gives the song its title: "Feels like I travel but I never arrive/ I wanna thrive not just survive. " Here we have psychologizing in the idea of traveling without ever arriving. With psychologizing there is a challenge to the literal perspective as "through psychologizing I change the idea of any literal action at all- political, scientific, personal- into a metaphorical enactment- entering all actions in the role of an idea (Hillman, 1975, pp. 127). In the metaphoric enactment of traveling without arriving there is a sense of the emptiness of this action when the person does not feel present. One enters into traveling in the role of an idea to realize the implicit impulse toward destination in the action and the futility of operating in this manner when there is no meaning. Through the psychologizing the question becomes what is traveling without arriving? Or perhaps, what is needed for the traveling to end and the arrival

to begin? Thus the idea of traveling without arriving conjures the sense of endless searching when there is no purpose to the action. Perhaps one must rethink both terms, as Hillman suggests “paradoxically, we gain breadth of soul and wider horizons through vertical descent” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 94). Perhaps the sense of arrival comes not from travelling laterally but journeying inwardly. In this way the psychologizing moves us toward soul by calling into question a literal external destination, bringing forth the idea that soul must be present for the arrival to happen.

This idea of traveling but not arriving can also be pathologized as dissociation from reality, as the lack of arrival suggests expansion of an unattainable ideal at the expense of genuine participation in everyday life. This dissociation is at the root of a collective dissociation in the modern world where there is always more progress, more horizons to be reached. We are traveling to a destination that is unattainable, living in the potential world without ever arriving. Slater writes of this modern American mindset in his discerning article, *Numb*, “Always looking to the future, always hopeful, always engaged with the new, America also retains its grip on the frontier vision, an incessant stepping forth wherein the movement itself eclipses the terrain traversed” (Slater, 2008, pp. 355). The traveling is such a prevalent state in the culture that the destination becomes secondary. Acknowledgement of the pathology through the psychologizing of traveling without arriving, however, and working with it is half the battle as the next lyric brings in the desire, the impulse of thriving as a transcendence of ego,

traveling outside one's impulse to survive and finally arriving into the presence of soul.

The actions of thriving, not just surviving can be first psychologized, then sublimated into Hillman's ideas of Dehumanizing or Soul-Making. Surviving can be psychologized as the idea of ego's protection while thriving as working beyond it, transcending the ego's instinct toward "survival" for thriving in the wholeness multiplicity of soul. In De-humanizing or soul-making there is a recognition of the soul beyond the human, as "a man may lose his life and not his soul, or lose his soul and keep his life" (Hillman, 1975, pp. 173). The soul is thus beyond the survival of human biology and soul-making involves nurturing this transcendence of man into the numinosity of other subtle forces. Thriving can be psychologized as this soulful existence, and the movement from surviving to thriving as the work of soul-making.

One might argue that the lyric of thriving and not just surviving could reflect the same desire for endless growth from the travel expansion and dissatisfaction of surviving in the present. Thriving rather than only surviving could reflect the American mindset's egoic desire for more. However when listening to the music the note sequence of the thriving and not surviving descends down to the pedal tone, a call and response opposite to the diverging sequence in the travel lyric. Traveling is a distant chord, thriving comes back to the one chord. This to me suggests thriving and not just surviving is a sort of arrival, and through psychologizing one can see

through this action of thriving for its potential in overcoming the expansive, dissociative ego of defensive survival in soul-making.

The next verse begins with “I come alive when I hear you singing/But lately I haven't been hearing a thing.” Here we observe an acknowledgement of external source of soul, a “you” who is singing, personified as an animating muse, a life-giving force. The “you” could be seen as Jung’s anima, the collective figure that can confer a sense of personal importance and meaning through the archetypes. Hillman writes, “Not I personify, but the anima personifies me, or soul-makes herself through me,...every single belief is a literalism except the belief of soul whose faith posits me and makes me possible as a personification of psyche” (Hillman, 1975, pp. 51). Hence, the anima may be personifying herself as the “you” in the lyric as she makes herself known to the protagonist as the one who he hears singing while also revealing herself to be the one who personifies him. Without the anima the sense of personhood is not possible, for as shown in the lyrics, the variable is not whether the anima is singing but whether he can hear it. He is the one who comes alive thanks to her, and not as a person but as a personification of her and the fact that he has not been hearing her recently speaks to the humility of awareness of his reliance on her in his call. All his literal, heroic beliefs in what he is doing mean nothing without her. Soul-making thus involves the capacity to listen to the anima-personified “you” who is singing so the soul can be made through the listener.

The verse continues, "I get the feeling that I'm in between/A machine and a man who only looks like me". This lyric speaks again to depersonalization, wherein "one's conviction in oneself as a person and the sense of reality of the world have departed. Everything and oneself become automatic, unreal, emptied out" (Hillman, 1975, pp. 44). Feeling like a machine reflects that automated self that is not in charge of one's own actions and the man who only looks like him suggests the emptiness of being without a sense of being a person from being depersonalized. Further, the sense of being "in between" implies a detachment from reality, underscoring the lack of presence in depersonalization.

The following verse continues, "I try and hide it and not let it show/ But deep down inside me I just don't know/ Am I a man if I feel like a hoax?/The stranger in the mirror's been wearing my clothes". When experiencing the pathology expressed here there is often the impulse to hide the suffering, as "sometimes the symptoms are hidden behind slick, thick masks of sanity" (Slater, 2008 pp. 361). In the lyrics he is admitting that despite the hiding there is still confusion in the inner and outer, as his hiding leads him to feel like a hoax, not real because he does not feel authentic to the mask that conceals the suffering. The idea of maintaining the persona is out of his hands, not under his control, for the persona "is subject to depersonalization and is not mine, but depends altogether upon the gift of belief in myself, a faith given through anima in my worth as carrier of soul." (Hillman, 1975, pp. 51). Feeling like a hoax, how he

appears is not up to him. Whether or not he feels at home in himself is dependent on his carrying of soul, and his acknowledgement of powerlessness over his persona is a step in opening to the multiplicity of psyche.

Next there is a bridge, with “I'm always close, but I'm never enough/ I'm always in line, but I'm never in love”. These lyrics in the bridge convey that the striving of being close and following the egoic perspective does not bring one to feeling “enough”. Here again is the alienation of travelling but not arriving, but this time there is the Either/or thinking in reflecting on himself that reveals the pathology of psychopathology. Slater writes on the pathology of the psychopath, “in particular what the psychopath does is dissociate the ‘me’ and ‘not me’ a trait explored in some depth by Adolf Guggenbuhl Craig in the Emptied Soul, where he suggests the absence of eros determines the nature of psychopathy” (Slater, 2008, pp. 360). In the lyrics there is a differentiation between me and not me as me, being close, not me, enough, and me, in line, and not me, in love (Eros) through the absolute lens of always and never, which suggests the dissociation of the psychopath. The pathological structure the absolute thinking of always and never is what leads to the pathology it is speaking of, being in line but not in love, the psychopathic absence of Eros.

Thus the image of being in line, the flat-lined affect of psychopathy is contrasted from being in love. However what frees the lyricist from complete psychopathy is the awareness of the pathology. Hillman writes in

Senex and Puer, "But my soul is opened by admitting my weakness and my need, for these needs make me a human creature, dependent in my creatureliness upon the creation" (Hillman and Slater, 2005, pp. 318) Through admitting his psychopathy both in lyric meaning and form of absolutes, the narrator is opening himself up for redemption to what he psychopathically most needs; Eros and Psyche as soul.

The final lyric of the bridge goes, "I get so down, but I won't give up". This final lyric is a reminder of an essential ingredient to soul making: faith. Amidst all the suffering, one must not give up on finding soul again, as "psychological faith is reflected in an ego that gives credit to images and turns to them in its darkness" (Hillman, 1975, pp.50). He feels down, but throughout the song he has given voice to these images arising and in this way has not given up on the soul. He engages with what Hillman refers to as "psychic necessity" in *the Myth of Analysis*, and enters into soul's psychic realm through the creation of the song, "thus involvement becomes the first condition for admission for the psychic realm, to the field of psychology" (Hillman, 1978 pp. 27) The song began with a vital involvement in the lyrics calling forth psyche through images such as a stranger in the mirror and a steering wheel, and ends with the faith of not giving up on her.

To conclude, this song is of personal importance to me as I listened to it before checking into rehabilitation from drug and alcohol addiction. I had taken time off Pacifica, lost sense of my soul, trying to find it by way of external spirits, but was losing soul all the more. With the delusional

thinking of alcoholism it took me so long to admit that I was sick, that the escapism was not working. Listening to the song's lyrics admitting, no I'm not alright led me to the place where I was ready to stop running, actually listen to the pathology and what it was trying to tell me and check in to get help. Instead of running away, in rehab I was faced with my pathologies, and through embracing them, I was slowly able to recover a sense of soul which led me back to Pacifica. Now, examining the piece through the lens of Archetypal Psychology's four moves : personifying, pathologizing, psychologizing and dehumanizing has enabled me to appreciate the psychically transformative possibilities of the song lyric all the more. Further, it has enabled me to see more clearly what Hillman means by soul-making, as an opening to the many forces of psyche through overcoming a willful literal perspective and recognizing the multiple ways the soul makes her way through us between mediating events. It has been a privilege to return to this song, appreciating the ways both music and archetypal psychology can lead us to soul.

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